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ABSTRACT

This paper provides theoretical background and methodology for a focus group study of influences on first-time Latino community college students. The first chapter identifies the need for research on Latino students, citing high attrition rates and focusing on three critical dynamics: making the transition to college, making connections on campus through student involvement, and influences on students' perceptions of their learning ability. The second chapter provides a review of research on first-year and Latino students, offering a theoretical perspective for the focus group study. The literature reviewed in this section indicates the following: (1) despite the 90% growth of Latino student enrollment between 1980 and 1991, colleges are not retaining these students; (2) student-related factors influencing attrition include poverty, unemployment, social class origins, inadequate academic preparation, weak study habits, self-doubt, low self-esteem, and cultural separation; (3) Latino college students face issues of changing identity, breaking cultural ties and family codes of loyalty and unity; and (4) student perceptions about learning ability are influenced by previous academic achievement and past interactions with faculty and peers, both in- and out-of-class. The final chapter reviews the methodology of a qualitative, focus group study of the attitudes and experiences of 17 first-time Latino students at a California community college and 13 at a Texas community college. This chapter also argues for the use of qualitative research not to draw statistical conclusions, but to uncover insights from student voices. Focus group questions are appended. (Contains 105 references.) (KP)

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FIRST-YEAR STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE: MAKING TRANSITIONS, FORMING CONNECTIONS, AND DEVELOPING PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT LEARNING

by

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

A considerable body of research conducted by the nation's leading authorities on college students indicates that students must have a meaningful and rewarding first-year experience in college, because the first year of college is crucial to academic success (Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). This issue is of particular significance to the two-year college sector where student departure rates are significantly higher than in four-year colleges and universities. High rates of institutional leaving have given rise to a debate related to whether two-year colleges function as open or revolving doors to higher educational attainment for nontraditional student populations (i.e., ethnic and racial minorities, first generation students, adult learners) who tend to view these colleges as their first, and often only, opportunity to attain a higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 1989; Olivas, 1979; Rendón, 1992; Valadez, 1993; Zwerling, 1976). According to Tinto (1993) first-year leaving represents a very sizable part of all institutional leavers, "leaving little wonder that institutional concern with attrition centers on the freshman year" (p. 15).

First-year Attrition in Two-Year Colleges

The likelihood that first time college students survive their initial year of college is not encouraging. Statistical data depict the grim story. Over half of all entering students will leave before they complete their first year of college (Tinto, 1993). Their departure reduces the likelihood that they will attain future

academic success (Carter & Wilson, 1993; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1987, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

Tinto (1993) provided different calculations that depict attrition in institutions of higher education. In examining 1992 ACT data on student departure during the first year, he noted a 47.9 and 27.4 percent rate of attrition in public and private two-year institutions, respectively (see Table 1). Table 1 depicts the reported attrition rates only for full-time freshmen. However, given that the majority of all two-year college students attend on a part-time basis, it is important to discern the combined full- and part-time rate of leave taking. Tinto estimated the adjusted freshman attrition rate to include part-time attenders. These estimates are noted in Table 2, which indicates a 54.2 percent attrition rate for both full- and part-time public community college freshmen. Without such estimations, the figures reported in Table 1 would underestimate the total percentage of freshmen leavers, especially in public community colleges where a large number of students attend part-time. When one considers attrition in all institutions in any year of college, it can again be noted that leave taking centers on the first year of college. In 1992, freshman attrition accounted for 53.3 and 67.7 percent of all institutional attrition in four- and two-year colleges, respectively (Tinto, 1993).

A study of the character of students' experiences during the first year of college is critical. The first year of college is an especially important year in the process of persistence. Identifying the dynamics involved in shaping the character of the first-year experience can do much to influence institutional policy aimed at reducing student attrition. Perhaps no other student cohort can benefit most from a critical analysis of the nature of the first-year experience than Latino students. Similar to American Indians, over half of all Latinos enrolled in higher education are concentrated in two-year colleges. While

Table 1

Institutional Rates of First-Year Attrition for Full-Time Entering Students (1992 ACT Survey)

Institutional Type	Full-Time Entrants
Four-year public	28.3%
Four-year private	24.0
All four-year institutions	26.8
Two-year public	47.9
Two-year private	27.4
All two-year institutions	44.0

Source: American College Testing Program, 1992; as cited in Tinto, V. (1993), Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

TABLE 2

Estimated Institutional Rates of First-Year Attrition for All Entering Students (1992 ACT Survey)

Institutional Type	All Entrants
Four-year public	30.0%
Four-year private	25.4
All four-year institutions	28.5
Two-year public	54.2
Two-year private	29.6
All two-year institutions	49.6

Source: American College Testing Program, 1992; as cited in Tinto, V. (1993), Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Latinos have benefited from the open door policy of two-year colleges, they have not necessarily made significant strides in their educational attainment. For Latinos, choosing to attend a two- rather than a four-year college is not inconsequential. The next section elaborates on what is known about Latinos in community colleges and the nature of attrition for this student group.

Latino Attrition in Community Colleges

Despite the 90 percent growth of Latino students in public two-year colleges between 1980 and 1991, existing research on Latino persistence and degree attainment indicates that such colleges are not retaining these students (Carter & Wilson, 1993; Nora, 1993; O'Brien, 1993). Although attrition continues to plague all student groups in two-year colleges, it appears to have a pronounced effect upon Latinos who are differentially concentrated in these institutions (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1993; Nora, 1993). The effect of high attrition and low degree completion could be devastating to Latino students who often enter two-year colleges unaware of the range of obstacles which affect their persistence. Padrón (1994) further warns that despite limited amounts of data and few studies, researchers have reached consensus that Latino students in two-year colleges are not doing well.

Determining Latino student attrition has often required calculating such rates in a variety of formats (i.e., full-time versus part-time attenders, stop-outs versus drop-outs, Chicanos versus Puerto Ricans, etc.). A major problem in calculating Latino student attrition in two-year colleges is the absence of national persistence and degree completion data for each Latino sub-group (Carter & Wilson, 1993). Without disaggregated data, it becomes difficult to calculate an accurate portrayal of attrition for each Latino subgroup. To overcome these limitations, researchers usually compare enrollment data and

degree completion rates in an attempt to measure Latino student persistence in two-year colleges. For example, Aguirre and Martinez (1993) found that during the 1986-87 academic year, Chicanos earned only 19,345 (4.4 percent) of the 436,308 associate degrees conferred in the United States, despite making up approximately 7.7 percent of the overall student population that year.

Recently, persistence data collected for the 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Study indicated that in 1992, Latinos had a 39 percent three-year persistence rate in public two-year colleges (Carter & Wilson, 1993). This finding suggests that a majority of Latinos who entered two-year colleges during the fall of 1989 were not in the same colleges three years later (at the end of the 1992 spring semester). Carter and Wilson (1993) state that the effect could be caused by either student transfer to another institution or attrition. However, a large body of research suggests that Latino transfer rates to four-year institutions has been historically low, often less than 10 percent (Cohen and Brawer, 1989; Nora, 1993; Padrón, 1994; Rendón & Nora, 1988), while attrition in two-year colleges remains continuously high (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1993; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Latino attrition in community colleges remains high and occurs as a result of many factors which have been categorized as either student- or institution-related (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Nora, 1993; Rendón & Nora, 1988; Rendón, Jalomo & Garcia, 1994). Among student-related factors that influence attrition are characteristics related to a student's background. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lower social class origins can negatively influence student persistence (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Valadez, 1993). Student-related factors such as inadequate academic preparation in high school, weak study habits and the lack of clarity in defining academic goals, as well as psychological factors, such as self-doubt, low self-esteem, anxiety, and cultural

separation further impact student persistence (Rendón, Justiz & Resta, 1988; Rendón & Nora, 1988; Rendón, Jalomo & Garcia, 1994).

Institution-related factors which influence Latino student attrition remain a central focus for researchers and policymakers alike (Padrón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo & Garcia, 1994). These factors are distinguished by their academic or student service nature. Academic factors which influence Latino student attrition include: limited class offerings; few Latino faculty; a curriculum which often ignores multicultural perspectives; antiquated teaching styles; and restricted tutoring assistance (Rendón & Nora, 1988; Rendón, Jalomo & Garcia, 1994). Student service factors affecting Latino attrition rates include: rising tuition and registration fees; inadequate financial aid offerings; improper counseling and advising; few Latino student services personnel; cutbacks in various student services programs; and an over-reliance on student-initiated involvement in academic and social activities occurring on campus (Rendón & Nora, 1988; Rendón, Jalomo & Garcia, 1994).

The literature on student persistence suggests that the extent to which Latino students experience success in college may be determined by how well these students negotiate three dynamics that are critical to retention. The first dynamic is related to how these students make the transition to college. The second dynamic is associated with how well these students form connections and become socially and academically integrated in campus life. The third dynamic is related to how these students perceive themselves as learners. It should be noted that each of these dynamics may be influenced by multiple in- and out-of-class experiences that occur during the first-year of college.

Negotiating the Transition to College

Research suggests that the transition to college is not the same for

traditional and nontraditional students (London, 1989; Rendón, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994). The passage to college for traditional students (i.e., recent high school graduates, those who enter college with a lapse of less than two years, upper and middle class students, or those coming from a family that has attended college) is considered to be rational and expected. It is often an expectation formed by contact with parents, friends, relatives and significant others who have at least attended, if not completed college (Terenzini et al., 1994). Many Latino and other nontraditional students often find the transition to college to be a major disjunction in their life course, for college-going is not a part of their family's tradition or expectations. Latino students often break, not continue, their family "traditions" when they enroll in college (Rendón, 1992). College-going for them means coming to terms with the sometimes difficult and often painful issues such as changing their identity, being perceived as different, leaving old friends behind, separating from their families, breaking cultural ties, and breaking family codes of loyalty and unity (Rodriguez, 1982; Rendón, 1992). Most community college faculty do not come from nontraditional backgrounds and are often unfamiliar with the range of issues that impact Latino student transitions to college (Rendón, 1994).

Similar to many first generation college freshmen, Latino students often struggle with living between two worlds during their first-year in college: the world from which they come and the world of higher education (London, 1989; Rendón, 1994; Rodriguez, 1982; Terenzini et al., 1994; Weis, 1985, 1992). Many fear that they will not be fully accepted in either world (Weis, 1985, 1992). Breaking away from certain family norms and behaviors can have positive implications and can foster a heightened self-concept, improved self-esteem, and reinforced identity for many freshmen (London, 1989). However, negative implications can create feelings of isolation, alienation, self-doubt,

psychological distress and can have a detrimental impact on self-concept, persistence and educational goals (London, 1978, 1989; Rendón, 1992; Rodriguez, 1982; Weis, 1985, 1992). This is especially true for many first-year Latino students who find that they must live between two worlds to retain two separate sets of identities, mannerisms and peer associations (Weis, 1985).

Forming Connections in College

Researchers such as Astin (1985) and Tinto (1987, 1993) have indicated that because nontraditional students are less likely to get socially and academically involved, they are most likely to leave college. Nontraditional students bring with them a diverse set of pre-college experiences that are not accommodated in the present model of teaching and learning found in most college campuses. Nontraditional students face the challenge of adapting to college life which often is quite alien when compared to the worlds from which they come (London, 1989; Rendón, 1992; Weis, 1985). While many nontraditional students do leave community colleges, the difference between those who stay to accomplish their educational goals and those who leave feeling disillusioned with higher education may be due to whether they make positive and quality connections in- and out-of-class during their freshman year (Rendón, 1994).

According to the literature on student involvement, academic and social integration factors, such as student-faculty and student-peer interaction, student participation in campus activities and student organizations, and utilization of campus services, will lead to greater involvement on campus and success in college (Astin, 1984, 1985; Fleishman, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994). This formula has appeared to work for many traditional students, but only for a small fraction

of non-traditional students. For example, Anderson (1981) found that students who entered community colleges, were employed (excluding work study) and lived off-campus (but not with parents) were more likely to drop out in both the first and second year of college than were students in other institutional settings.

Developing Perceptions About College Learning

Student perceptions about their learning ability are often influenced by their previous academic achievement and their past interactions with faculty and peers, both in- and out-of-class (Terenzini et al., 1994). In a study of freshmen attending four-year and two-year institutions, Terenzini and others (1994) found that first-year students defined learning broadly and felt that real learning meant "learning about one's self, discovering abilities or personal sources of strength, and developing pride in one's ability to survive" (p. 7).

How students can discover their strengths and begin to believe in their ability to learn has recently been addressed in the literature. Terenzini and others (1994) found that many nontraditional students come to college with negative perceptions about themselves as learners. The researchers indicated that "these students' high school experiences had signaled to them in various ways that they were not seen as serious or competent learners and, thus, were expected to fail...such experiences failed to confirm or validate the student as one capable of learning and deserving a place in a college classroom" (p. 6-7).

Community colleges have made inroads in understanding the needs of the nontraditional student, but must continue to help these students negotiate the transition to college, enhance their opportunities to make connections in college, and help to foster a positive perception of student learning in college. Rendón (1994) suggests that additional research is needed to explore how in- and out-of-class experiences influence these dynamics in two-year colleges.

especially during the critical first year of college.

Despite the increasing amount of research examining the first-year experience in college, a special focus is needed to address the Latino experience, for this student group continues to have an exceedingly high rate of attrition. Although existing literature on the first-year experience continues to focus primarily on traditional students in four-year settings, there remains the need to study nontraditional student groups, in particular Latinos in two-year colleges, who exhibit disproportionate enrollments in such colleges (Carter & Wilson, 1993). By examining the complex nature of the Latino first-year college experience, in- and out-of-class, a better understanding of the dynamics which comprise the first-year experience can further be identified and evaluated in an attempt to curb the historically high attrition rate for this student group.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of in- and out-of-class experiences of Latino community college freshmen in the context of three critical dynamics: making the transition to college; making connections on campus through student involvement; and fostering multiple perspectives of how students view themselves as learners. In addition, this study seeks to gain a greater understanding of these three dynamics in an effort to use the information to drive policy and practice that could foster Latino student retention during the first year of college.

This study was undertaken as part of the Out-of-Class Experiences Program for the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment. Data gathered for the In- and Out-of-Class Experiences Project provided the basis for this study. The focus of the project was to learn more about how in- and out-of-class experiences influence first-year participation for

diverse community college student populations.

The research questions guiding this study have been divided into three thematic areas which include:

1. The Transition to College
   a. What in- and out-of-class experiences characterize the transition to college for Latino community college students during the first semester in college?
   b. How do Latino community college students make the transition from one cultural experience to another?
2. Making Connections in College
   What in- and out-of-class experiences foster or impede Latino community college students' involvement in institutional life?
3. Student Perceptions of Their Learning Ability
   a. What in- and out-of-class experiences play a role in fostering Latino students' positive or negative perceptions of their learning?
   b. Who are the in- and out-of-class agents who facilitate or impede the ability of Latino students to perceive themselves as capable college students?

The purpose of this study is not to draw a causal connection between the three dynamics stated above and student persistence. Rather, the intent is to understand the richness and complexities of these dynamics in the context of understanding more about the character of the first year experience for Latino students. In particular, the study will capture these dynamics from student voices to determine the scope of these experiences and to provide insights into how students experience and perceive the process of making the transition to college, forming connections, and developing positive attitudes about learning.

Significance of the Study

While this is not a study of student retention, its purpose is to gain greater insights into the three dynamics mentioned above so that policymakers and practitioners might use research-based data to improve academic and student support services to enhance freshman retention rates, especially for Latino students. The significance of this study can be divided between three topical areas: significance for researchers, community college policymakers and practitioners, and Latino college students.

Significance for Researchers

This study will help fill the gap in the literature regarding the in- and out-of-class experiences of Latino freshmen in community college settings and the relationship of such experiences to retention. In contrast to the predominant in-class experience studies, research on the impact of out-of-class experiences on students is relatively scant, although many researchers agree that both in- and out-of-class factors have a definite impact on student learning and development (Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The impact of the freshman year experience on negotiating transitions and forming connections in community college can still be considered uncharted territory for researchers studying nontraditional students. In reviewing twenty years of research on how college affects students, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) examined the within-college effects associated with student involvement and development and concluded that "little research explores [these] kinds of college experiences" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 205). Similarly, relatively little is known about the dynamics and effects of out-of-class experiences, including the role of parents, children, co-workers,

spouses and friends on the academic and social development of nontraditional students in community college. Astin (1975) suggested that future research could identify "other behavioral measures (through direct observations of students on campus, in dormitories, in classrooms and so forth) that might also indicate involvement . . . [since] certain students (high ability students, black students, women, and so forth) might manifest their involvement in different ways" (p. 176).

Significance for Policymakers and Practitioners

Four major issues address the significance of this study for community college policymakers and practitioners: (1) the first-year college experience is critical to student persistence; (2) Latinos and other nontraditional students who have been underserved and underrepresented in higher education have a critical need for enriching experiences during their first year in order to avoid attrition; (3) first-year student retention has both direct and indirect implications on campus budgetary concerns; and (4) the marketing of colleges and academic programs to incoming freshmen often requires addressing current student retention rates and related information.

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) state that approximately four million new freshmen are expected to arrive each year on two- and four-year college campuses. An influential factor in whether a freshman decides to stay or leave a community college depends on circumstances associated with their first-year experience (Tinto, 1987, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). For most of these students, success and persistence will hinge on positive and rewarding encounters with peers, faculty, and various other campus-based entities (Terenzini et al., 1994; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Noel, Levitz and Saluri (1985) echo this warning, stating that overwhelming evidence suggests that student

success is largely determined by experiences that occur during the first year in college.

A growing number of nontraditional students will be among the vast cohort of freshmen arriving at college campuses each fall. Many of these students have diverse academic and social skills, interests, and life experiences. Many are ethnic and racial minorities (Astin, 1982; Cohen & Brawer, 1989; London, 1992; Mow & Nettles, 1990; Rendón & Nora, 1988; Weis, 1985, 1992); women and mothers (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982); and first-generation students (London, 1989; Rendón, 1992; Weis, 1992; Zwerling, 1992). Despite the fact that community colleges have been the initial public institution choice for many of these students (Cohen & Brawer, 1989), the problem of high student attrition during the first year and low persistence and educational attainment rates leaves the community college open for criticism (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1993; Nora, 1993; Olivas, 1979; Rendón, 1992; Tinto, 1993).

Community colleges are concerned about first-year student attrition and retention. When a freshman drops out of college, both the student and institution usually lose. Most community colleges employ some combination of human and financial resources to retain their students. Such resources are directed towards registering, financing, teaching and counseling students. Likewise, budgetary concerns regarding full-time enrollment and full-time equivalency (FTE) of freshmen persisters requires community colleges to employ resources to retain these students.

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) noted that "as high school enrollments have declined, colleges have intensified their recruitment of prospective freshmen and have increased efforts to retain students once they have enrolled" (p. xiii). The competition for both high achieving and nontraditional freshmen has

intensified over the past decade. As colleges attempt to market themselves and their programs, they are also concerned about the image they portray in the student marketplace. The persistence rates of enrolled students is often an area which must be addressed in order to evaluate freshman success (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Graduates and transfers, in the case of community colleges, may be viewed as successes, assets or benefits to a college. Non-graduates, such as stopouts or dropouts are believed to harm a college's credibility (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Significance for Latino College Students

This study will be useful to Latino students interested in identifying those experiences which influence the nature of the first-year experience in college. Through identification and evaluation of the sources and development of these elements prior to and during the first year in college, a better understanding of the nature of the first-year experience for Latinos can be attained. Further, knowing more about the negotiations that Latino students make in their transition to college, how they make connections in college, and how they perceive their learning ability, will add to the knowledge base concerning first-year students in college. This should enlighten college policymakers and practitioners about the needs of these students during their first and succeeding years in college.

Definition of Terms

The term "involvement" refers to those behavioral characteristics and activities that can be attributed to Astin's (1984; 1985) theory of student involvement. In short, involvement is the "time, energy, and effort students devote to the learning process" (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in

American Higher Education, 1984, p. 17).

The term "Latino" is used to describe a student of Chicano (Mexican American), Puerto-Rican, Cuban, or Latin-American descent. The term "Latino" will be used interchangeably with the term Hispanic when reporting descriptions and findings from research studies specifically addressing this population. In this study most of the students interviewed are presumed to be of Chicano/Mexican American descent, given that the two-year colleges they were attending were in southern California and west Texas.

The term "nontraditional student" includes (but is not limited to) returning women, first-generation college students, racial and ethnic minorities, adult learners, veterans, students who dropped out of high school, GED earners, career changers, and single parents (Astin, 1985; Cohen and Brawer, 1989; London, 1989; Rendón, 1994; Weis, 1985; Zwerling and London, 1992).

The term "traditional freshman" refers to a student under the age of 20 who enters college directly from high school or with a lapse of less than two years. A traditional freshman is likely to be a recent high school graduate, middle class, coming from a family that has attended college, and is attending classes full-time, while living on campus (Rendón, 1994; Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This study is concerned with Latinos in community colleges for several important reasons. First, the growing Latino population is having a significant impact relative to enrollment in the nation's educational system. Second, Latinos are differentially clustered in two-year institutions, although their retention and transfer rates are less than satisfactory. Third, few Latinos are earning baccalaureates and this may be traced back to their low retention and transfer rates in two-year colleges. Fourth, Latinos have not been the subject of extensive research and educators have much to learn about the educational experience of Latino students.

Given the rationale for selecting Latinos as the focus of this study, this chapter will focus on a review of the literature concerning the educational trajectory of this population before and after their college enrollment. Because the literature on Latino college students is relatively scant, the review will be embellished with related research on nontraditional students. Additionally, the chapter will review some of the most important theoretical perspectives that provide a foundation for understanding the educational experience of Latino and nontraditional student populations in three areas: 1) making the transition to college; 2) forming connections with institutional life; and 3) developing perceptions about learning.

Latino Demography and Education

Over a decade ago, while writing on Latino educational attainment and predictors of college achievement, Duran (1983) wrote:

> The investigation of what factors underlie ethnic minorities' opportunities to attain and succeed in higher education is an inductive enterprise that has no absolute beginning or end. In terms of social science analyses of what factors influence educational attainment, the wise are quick to understand that there are no simple answers. Particular background factors, such as ethnicity or minority group status, do not fully explain the conditions of life that cause some people to achieve more educationally than others. . . . [Yet] there is little doubt that Hispanics do not benefit from the U.S. educational system as much as non minorities do. (p. ix)

Duran's (1983) commentary regarding educational attainment studies provides the impetus for reviewing the literature on Latino students. To provide a context for understanding educational issues surrounding Latino students, it is necessary to portray important demographic patterns and their impact on the nation's educational system.

Latino Demographic Patterns

According to a policy report published by the American Council on Education (ACE), in 1990 approximately 22.4 million Latinos resided in the United States (O'Brien, 1993). This figure marked a significant increase over the past decade. During the decade of the 1980's the Latino population grew by 53 percent, compared to 6 percent for Whites and 13 percent for African Americans. The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) reported that in the 1989-90 school year, more than 4 million Latino students were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. This figure is projected to increase to over 5 million during the 1994-95 school year. More than 90

percent of these students were expected to enroll in public schools, while approximately 8 percent would attend Catholic schools (WICHE, 1991).

While the majority of Latinos still reside within the Southwest, more than half live in two states: California (34 percent) and Texas (21 percent). California and Texas historically have been the residence of choice for a majority of Latinos who are from Mexican American ancestry (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990). O'Brien (1993) supports this finding by stating that during the 1994-95 school year, half of all Latino school-age children are projected to attend public schools in the Western region of the United States.

The large and growing Latino population in California, Texas and other southwestern states has given rise to concerns regarding the group's low educational achievement. For instance, California anticipates a Latino school-age enrollment of 2.3 million during the 1995 academic year, while forecasting that Latinos will comprise the largest 0-15 age group in the state by 2015 (Hayes-Bautista et al., 1988). Yet, despite making up the largest minority school-age population in the state, less than four percent of California Latino high school graduates in 1994 were fully eligible for admission to the University of California (Hurtado & Garcia, 1994). In describing the current level of Latino participation in the state's university system, a task force of leading Latino educational researchers recently concluded that, "this profound under-representation distinctly threatens the economic and social fabric of the state and nation, especially because the Latino population is growing at a much faster rate than other ethnic groups" (Hurtado & Garcia, 1994, p. 9).

The rise in the overall Latino population during the 1980's and early 1990's has been evident in the 18-24 age cohort, the traditional age for attending college as an undergraduate. During the ten year period from 1982 to 1992, Latinos experienced vigorous growth in this age grouping. In 1982

there were approximately 2 million Latinos in this cohort compared to over 2.75 million in 1992. During the same period the number of African Americans in this cohort declined by over 350,000 from nearly 3.9 million in 1982 to approximately 3.5 million in 1992. Whites experienced a decline of over 4.5 million during the same period to from 24.2 million in 1982 to approximately 19.6 million in 1992. The result of this demographic pattern indicates that the number of Whites and African Americans in the traditional undergraduate ages of 18-24 is declining, while the number of Latinos is increasing. However, the overall number of Whites and African Americans in this age cohort is still much greater than that for Latinos. Despite the recent rise in the Latino student population in various segments of the educational system, Latinos still trail African Americans and Whites by a large margin in terms of overall high school completion rates (Carter & Wilson, 1994). The next section focuses on Latino high school attainment.

High School Attainment

Latino high school attainment rates often are defined by the group's overall percentage of high school graduates and level of attrition during the high school years (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Astin, 1982; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Duran, 1983; Rendón & Nora, 1988). During the past twenty years, Latino students have suffered from rising attrition rates which often begin during the junior high school years (7-8) and extend throughout high school and into college (Astin, 1982; Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Duran, 1983; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; Nora, 1993; Olivas, 1986; Rendón and Nora, 1988; Tinto, 1987, 1993). This trend has severely limited the number of Latino high school graduates and students participating in higher education. Further complications such as unmet college subject requirements, low college

entrance exam scores, and low grade point averages prevent many Latino high school students from enrolling in four-year universities directly upon graduation from high school (Duran, 1983; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; Nora, 1993; Rendón & Nora, 1988). Numerous research studies have investigated the causes of low educational attainment for this population along each phase of the educational pipeline beginning in elementary school (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Duran, 1983; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; Nora, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1992).

As Latino enrollment rates in public elementary and secondary schools continue to rise, so are Latino high school dropout rates, fueling speculation that Latinos are participating in an educational system which more often than not perpetuates their limited educational attainment (Olivas, 1986). The alarmingly high Latino dropout rate has nearly or already reached fifty percent in many urban and suburban high school districts across the country (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Nora, 1993). Researchers such as Nora and Cabrera (1992) have documented instances where high dropout rates have become exceptionally acute in large metropolitan school districts where an additional ten percent of African American and Latino students drop out of high school during their senior year. The effect of significant and prolonged high school attrition has left Latinos as the only major racial or ethnic group with a larger percentage of non-high school graduates than completers for adults age 25 or over in 1990 (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). As reported in Table 1, in 1990 Latinos had the largest percentage of any racial or ethnic group attaining less than an ninth grade education.

Table 1 reveals that Latinos closely trailed African Americans and American Indians as the leading student groups with the largest percentage of

TABLE 1

Educational Attainment of the U.S. Population by Racial and Ethnic Group, 1990

(Percentage of adults age 25 years and older)

Highest level reached	White	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Other
Eighth grade or less	8.9	14.0	12.9	13.8	30.7	10.4
Some HS, no diploma	13.1	20.4	9.5	23.2	19.5	14.4
HS diploma	31.0	29.1	18.5	27.9	21.6	30.0
Some college, no degree	19.1	20.8	14.7	18.5	14.3	18.7
Associate degree	6.3	6.4	7.7	5.3	4.8	6.7
Bachelor's degree	13.9	6.1	22.7	7.5	5.9	13.1
Grad/Professional degree	7.7	3.2	13.9	3.8	3.3	7.2

Note: The figures are based on the 1990 census and cover adults age 25 and older. The "Other" category includes those whose racial or ethnic group is not known. Hispanics may be of any race. The figures may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Source: Census Bureau; Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, September, 1994, p. 16.

adults age 25 years or older who have attended high school but have never attained a diploma. African Americans lead this category at a 23.2 percent rate followed closely by American Indians at 20.4 percent and Hispanics at 19.5 percent. Yet, when combining the rates for eighth grade attainment and high school attendance without earning a diploma, Latinos had the highest percentage (50.2) of adults age 25 years or older who have never graduated from high school. The comparable rate for Whites is 22 percent; American Indians, 34.4 percent; and African Americans, 37 percent.

As reported in Table 2, the high school completion rate for Latinos increased from 52.1 percent in 1991 to 57.3 percent in 1992 (Carter & Wilson, 1994). This figure constituted a 5.2 percent gain from the previous year. However, when analyzing Latino completion rates, one should use caution in taking an overly optimistic view of their recent increase as compared to corresponding rates for Whites and African Americans. Latinos still remain the lowest achieving group in comparison to Whites and African Americans. In 1992, the high school completion rate for Latinos trailed Whites by 26 percentage points and African Americans by 17 percentage points, despite the significant gain from the previous year (Carter & Wilson, 1994). Test score data are not much better. In 1994, Mexican Americans had an average SAT score which was 71 points below the national average for Whites in the verbal section of the test and 68 points below the White average in the mathematical section (College Board, 1994).

Latinos in Higher Education

Despite the high attrition rate in secondary schools, Latinos are enrolling in colleges and universities in growing numbers. Yet, disproportionately high losses of Latino and other minority students occur in the transition from high

TABLE 2

Latino High School Completion Rates and College Participation Rates by Gender 1980 to 1992

Percentage of adults 18-24 years old

Year	Male HS Completers	Males in College	Male HS Completers in College	Female HS Completers	Females in College	Female HS Completers in College
1980	51.2	15.8	30.9	56.7	16.2	28.5
1981	50.4	16.6	32.9	60.7	16.7	27.6
1982	55.0	14.9	27.2	60.0	18.6	30.9
1983	49.2	15.7	31.9	60.0	18.7	31.2
1984	57.4	16.1	28.1	62.3	19.5	31.3
1985	58.2	14.8	25.5	67.3	18.8	27.9
1986	57.4	17.4	30.3	62.9	19.2	30.6
1987	59.5	18.5	31.1	63.8	16.6	26.0
1988	52.7	16.6	31.5	58.1	17.7	30.4
1989	52.5	14.7	27.9	59.8	17.7	29.6
1990	53.7	15.3	28.4	55.3	16.4	29.7
1991	47.8	14.0	29.3	56.9	22.2	39.1
1992	52.0	17.8	34.3	62.8	24.8	39.4

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Current Population Reports, School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1993, Series P-20, No. 474"; American Council on Education, Office of Minorities in Higher Education, 1993 Twelfth Annual Report, p. 49.

Note: College participation rates were calculated using the total population and high school graduates as the bases.

school to college. Also, more Latinos enter two-year colleges than four-year universities (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Nora, 1993; O'Brien, 1993; Padrón, 1994; Rendón & Nora, 1988). College participation rates for the ten year period from 1982-1992 indicate that the overall percentage increase in Latino higher education participation ranked only behind Asian Americans in four-year college attendance. During the same period, Latinos had the largest percentage increase of any major ethnic or racial group in two-year college participation (O'Brien, 1993).

Latino College Enrollments

In 1992, over 5.7 million students were attending two-year colleges in the United States. This figure constitutes approximately 40 percent of the 14.5 million students enrolled in all colleges and universities across the country. During the 1992 academic year over one-half million (545,000) Latinos students enrolled in higher education could be found on two-year college campuses, comprising 9.5 percent of all two-year college students in the United States. The total number of Latinos attending two-year colleges represented a 30 percent increase over the previous four years and added an additional 161,000 Latinos on community college campuses since 1988 (Carter & Wilson, 1994).

Table 3 details the 1992 enrollment levels in public colleges and universities by type of institution and race/ethnicity. From 1982 to 1992, Latino enrollments at two-year institutions increased by 23.1 percent, from 489,000 to 602,000 students (Carter & Wilson, 1994). In 1992, Latino students led all other racial and ethnic groups in the overall percentage of students enrolled in two-year colleges at a 57.1 percent rate, while Whites had the lowest rate (excluding non-resident aliens) at 37.9 percent (Carter & Wilson, 1994). Although there

TABLE 3

1982 and 1992 College Enrollments

by Type of Institution, Racial and Ethnic Group

(in thousands)

	Four-Year Institutions			Two-Year Institutions		
Student Group	1982	1992	Change [Pct]	1982	1992	Change [Pct]
Whites	6,306	6,747	+441 [7.0]	3,692	4,123	+431 [11.7]
African Americans	612	791	+179 [29.2]	489	602	+113 [23.1]
Hispanics	229	410	+181 [79.0]	291	545	+254 [87.3]
Asian Americans	193	408	+215 [111.4]	158	289	+ 74 [82.9]
American Indians	39	55	+ 16 [41.0]	49	64	+ 15 [30.6]

Source: U.S. Department of Education; Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, September, 1994, p. 15.

remains a steady increase in the percentage of Latinos participating in higher education, it should be noted that most Latinos continue to disproportionately enroll in two-year colleges versus four-year institutions (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter and Wilson, 1993; Cohen & Brawer, 1989; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; Nora, 1993). According to Table 3, in 1992, Latinos trailed Whites and African Americans in the number of students enrolled in four-year colleges (410,000 versus 6,747,000 and 791,000, respectively). During the ten year period from 1982 to 1992, Latinos experienced a 79 percent increase in four-year college enrollment (Carter & Wilson, 1994). Within this period, Latino enrollment at four-year institutions increased 38 percent during 1987-1992. In 1994, Latino enrollment in four-year institutions was 440,000 compared to 229,000 a decade earlier. Carter and Wilson (1993) suggest that this steady increase is due, in part, to the increasing number of Latino graduates who are completing high school and enrolling in four-year colleges in greater numbers.

Despite greater number of Latinos on four-year college campuses, the overall participation rate of Latinos in higher education is still relatively low. O'Brien (1993) cautions against taking an overly optimistic view of Latino higher college participation due to the fact that "during the decade 1980 to 1991, the proportion of Latinos to total enrollment in higher education increased only slightly: from 4 percent in 1980 to 6 percent in 1991" (p. 5). Rendón and Nora (1988) similarly argue that toward the end of the 1980s, the regional and national trends indicated decreasing higher education participation rates for Latinos and African Americans (as a percentage of their overall college enrollment after high school) and increasing higher education enrollment for Whites, "in spite of the fact that high school enrollments for Whites were declining and increasing for Blacks and Hispanics" (p. 10).

Latino College Attainment

As Latino enrollment rates in four-year institutions continue to increase, attention is expected to focus on degree completion rates (Carter & Wilson, 1994; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; Tinto, 1993). However, recent data on degree completion indicate that most colleges and universities are not fully succeeding in retaining Latino students (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; O'Brien, 1993; Padrón, 1994). Numerous studies have documented that Latino students are the least likely of any major racial or ethnic groups to persist in college. Several studies have examined the reasons why Latino students may leave college. O'Brien (1993) argues that most Latino students who leave college do so for non-academic reasons. For example, Sanchez (1992) found that 40 percent of the Latino college students in their study who left college did so to take a job, while 37 percent left to address personal problems and 34 percent left due to unexpected financial problems.

Aguirre and Martinez (1993) argue that completion rates for college students, especially Latino and other minority students, "are a function of the sociopolitical dynamics of the day" (p. 49). Vining Brown and others (1994) similarly state that "the number of minority students receiving a bachelor's degree from a given institution is a function of the number of such students entering that institution plus the ability of the institution to retain them" (p. 12). Intervening strategies, such as government-sponsored financial aid, are often cited as influential variables in student retention and degree completion (Nora, 1993). Such interventions, for instance, help offset the effect of rising tuition costs which disproportionately (and negatively) affect many Latino and minority college students. If cutbacks in financial aid offerings occurred, one could expect that Latino student enrollments would decline; attrition rates would

increase; and the expected time to complete a bachelor's degree program would lengthen (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993).

Latinos also exhibit the lowest degree completion rates compared to most other major racial and ethnic groups. In 1986, only 33 percent of Latinos who entered college directly from high school in 1980 had attained a bachelor's degree (O'Brien, 1993). In a recent study of almost 300 colleges and universities, 40 percent of Latino students who were first-time, full-time freshmen in 1984 had graduated by fall 1990, compared with 62 percent of Asian Americans, 56 percent of Whites, and 31 percent of African Americans (Vining Brown et al., 1994). The low rate of degree completion for Latinos and African Americans has led to the belief that "some institutions producing large numbers of minority students who earn bachelor's degrees are not graduating minority students at the same rate as other students" (Vining Brown et al., 1994, p. 13).

In 1989, Latino students produced a mere 2.9 percent of all bachelor's degrees (Vining Brown et al., 1994). Two years later, in 1991, Latinos received 3.4 percent of all bachelor's degrees conferred and 5.2 percent of all associate degrees awarded (O'Brien, 1993). The small gain in the percentage of bachelor's degrees conferred to Latinos indicates that their degree attainment is not keeping pace with their growing participation and enrollment rates in four-year institutions. Similar to enrollment trends, in 1991, Latinos received a greater percentage of associate degrees than bachelor's degrees. Various research studies suggest that these phenomena could be related to issues such as the over-representation of Latinos in two-year colleges, their retention in these institutions, and their transfer from two- to four-year institutions (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Nora, 1993; Olivas, 1979; Rendón & Nora, 1988; Rendón, Jalomo & Garcia, 1994). As noted in Chapter 1, attrition rates in two-year

colleges tend to be exceedingly high and are related to a number of student- and institution-related factors that influence persistence. Clearly, baccalaureate attainment rates for Latinos could increase significantly if Latinos experienced academic success in community colleges.

Thus far, the review of the literature on Latinos in the educational system leads to the following conclusions: (1) the Latino population will continue to grow dramatically, and will impact the nation's schools and colleges with increased enrollment; and (2) Latinos continue to be underrepresented both in college participation and degree attainment. These conclusions lead to the important realization that Latinos, who are disproportionately enrolled in community colleges, must find a satisfying and rewarding first year college experience in two-year institutions. The next section focuses on the theoretical perspectives that ground the study of the first year experience for Latino students.

Theoretical Perspectives on the First-Year College Experience

Research has indicated that an overwhelming majority of students who leave higher education do so during their first and second year in college (Carter & Wilson, 1994; Nora, 1993; Tinto, 1987, 1993). This finding is especially crucial to Latino and other nontraditional student populations who tend to enter higher education at lower participation rates compared to White and other traditional student populations (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Attinasi, 1986; Hurtado & Garcia, 1994; Nora, 1993; O'Brien, 1993). The effect of this phenomenon has left Latinos and other nontraditional minority populations "grossly under-represented in higher education and in almost all occupations that require a college education" (Astin, 1982, p. 51). In order to identify the range of dynamics associated with the first year college experience, a review of

the literature on Latino and other nontraditional college students will focus on issues and theoretical perspectives related to three areas: 1) making the transition to college, 2) forming connections with institutional life, and 3) developing perceptions about learning. Background information will be presented first, followed by a theoretical perspective on each area.

Making the Transition to College

Academic success during the first year of college may well be dependent on how well students negotiate the transition to college. In a recent study of college freshmen, Terenzini and others (1994) found that the transition from high school or work to college is a complex process which varies according to a student's social, family, and educational background; individual personality; the nature and mission of the institution being attended; the people encountered in college; and a complex interaction of these variables. These findings substantiate Nora's (1993) assertion that community college students bring diverse socioeconomic, academic and social factors to college that will continuously influence their academic progress. For many nontraditional college freshmen with little or no family experience with college-going behavior and practices, these factors become magnified as these students often become overwhelmed, confused, and discouraged with their first-year college experience (London, 1992; Rendón, 1992, 1994; Rodriguez, 1975, 1982; Terenzini et al., 1994; Weis, 1985, 1992).

Cultural Disjunction.

The transition to college for nontraditional students often requires contemplating the cultural costs associated with educational mobility. One of these is cultural disjunction. Rodriguez (1975, 1982) and Rendón (1992) have revealed that attending college as a first generation Latino student

can sometimes become a difficult, confusing, and emotional experience. In detailing his college experience, Rodriguez argued that first-generation "scholarship boys" may be required to balance their loyalty between a predictable and familiar family life with the often unpredictable and unfamiliar world of college. Eventually, Rodriguez suggested that such students must choose between the two worlds. If they intend to succeed as a student, they must separate from certain family traditions and lifestyles in order to become a member of the community of scholars.

Rendón (1992) similarly noted that being a Mexican American "scholarship girl" is often a reflective and emotional experience for many first-generation college students. In describing her transition to college, she noted that the language, traditions and values of the academy are different and sometimes in conflict with the family traditions of first-generation Mexican American college students. Terenzini and others (1994) have further suggested that for many nontraditional freshmen, college attendance is impacted by out-of-class family influences which can include breaking family codes of unity. When a student enrolls in college as the first family member to enroll in higher education, the college experience can become not a natural, but an abnormal experience fraught with trauma and loss. This experience is often overlooked by college faculty and administrators who largely come from traditional families where college-going is an expected rite of passage.

Rendón (1994) suggested that many first generation students come to college unprepared, either academically or psychologically. They are often afraid of failure. In her study of first-year college students, the researcher found that many felt lost in a strange academic environment that had little or nothing to do with the realities they faced out-of-class. Some did not even know what questions to ask to get help. Low expectations had been set for many of these

students; in fact, for some students most everyone had given up on them at least once in their life.

Rendón (1994) suggested that first generation and nontraditional students often are required to maintain dual identities in college because the academic and social environment on campus is so different from the students' home and community environment. Similarly, in her study of commuter students attending an urban community college, Weis (1985, 1992) found that campus environments are influenced by the class, race and gender of the students attending them. This was particularly true for many minority and first generation students who found that they must live between two worlds to retain two separate sets of identities, mannerisms and peer associations. The researcher suggested that leaving one's cultural and family norms can have positive or negative effects on one's behavior. Positive effects can include an improved self-esteem and reinforced identity. However, the downside of attending college is that students may experience alienation, self-doubt and cultural conflict.

Terenzini and others (1994) noted that for most traditional students who come from families where college-going behavior is well established, attending college often is encouraged and expected. In this sense, the transition to college reflects the extension of family values and traditions. But for nontraditional students from working class families, especially when the student is the first in the family to attend college, the transition from high school to college is often a traumatic decision that represents a conscious move to overcome limited socioeconomic conditions. First generation students usually break family codes of unity. Their college experience becomes unnatural, fraught with trauma and loss. In making the decision to attend college, students begin to experience the agony of choice (London, 1989). During the transition

to college, such students may begin to realize that they are allowing their identities to change.

London (1989) cautions that being the first in one's family to attend college should not imply poor family or cultural functioning. Rather, the passage into college may be viewed as a milestone for moving from one culture into another. Terenzini and others (1994) have similarly noted the importance of negotiating a positive transition to college for nontraditional students from families where the precedent of going to college is not well established. Leading researchers in higher education also argue that a smooth transition to college may make the difference between whether students stay or leave college after the critical first year (Astin, 1982; Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rendón, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994; Tinto, 1987, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

London (1989) suggests that students living in different, often conflicting worlds of home and college, appear to be caught in a complex process of losing, redefining and rediscovering what they hold dearest. London (1989) explored how students go about reconciling familial pressures as they experience biographical and social dislocation and found that some students often balance conflicting roles—staying at home or leaving to attend college or work in the outside world, enjoying autonomy while keeping ties with parents, adopting a new culture in college while retaining old, more familiar cultural customs, and changing their identity, while being careful not to become "too different." London's (1989) work reveals that in some cases integration is not a hindrance to persistence. Rather, students flow in and out of campus-based cultural norms to achieve the goals of affiliation, membership, community or identity. However, Rodriguez (1982) and Rendón (1993) stated that the process

of integration for first-generation Latino students sometimes occurs with great difficulties.

A Theoretical Perspective on the Transition to College. Several researchers have attempted to explain how individuals from a minority culture interface with a majority culture (de Anda, 1984; Padilla, 1980; Polgar, 1960; Valentine, 1971; Zambrana, 1988). For almost three decades, three competing models have been used to describe these interactions and dynamics: the cultural deficit model, the cultural difference model, and the bicultural socialization model. According to de Anda (1984), the cultural deficit model inferred that when cultural norms of minority groups varied from those of the majority culture, minorities were identified as deviant and destructive. The cultural deficit model experienced prevalent use in the compensatory education programs of the mid-1960's, but was later abandoned after social scientists objected to the use of mainstream cultural norms as the evaluative criteria and the underlying assumptions of the structural inferiority of minority cultures (de Anda, 1984).

The shortcomings associated with the cultural deficit model were intended to be overcome by the cultural difference model which focused on the uniqueness of each minority culture (de Anda, 1984). In this model the elements of a minority culture were viewed as internally consistent and independent of a majority culture. Hence, in order to determine the socializing elements in a given culture, it was necessary to examine the minority culture in its own context rather than judge it according to its similarity to, or difference from, the majority culture (Baratz & Baratz, 1970; Valentine, 1971). Valentine (1971) argued that:

> The central theoretical weakness of the [cultural] difference model is an implicit assumption that different cultures are necessarily competitive alternatives, that distinct cultural systems can enter human experience only as mutually exclusive alternatives, never as intertwined or simultaneously available repertories. (p. 141)

Valentine (1971) criticized both the cultural deficit and cultural difference models for their negligence in identifying the vital construct of biculturation. The notion of biculturation has its roots in a study completed by Polgar (1960) who studied American Indians living on the reservation and found that they regularly engaged in a process which he termed "biculturation." Polgar defined biculturation as a process where American Indians were simultaneously enculturated and socialized in two different ways of life. These included a contemporary form of their traditional American Indian lifestyle and the mainstream Euro-American culture.

Polgar's (1960) biculturation framework was later employed by Valentine (1971) in an ethnographic study of poverty and African American cultures during the early 1970's. A major finding in Valentine's study was that a bicultural socialization process existed for African Americans who were simultaneously committed to both the Black and mainstream cultures, both of which, the researcher suggested, were not mutually exclusive. Valentine formulated a bicultural model that postulated a dual socialization process for minority groups. This process included enculturation experiences within their own cultural group, as well as less comprehensive but significant exposure to socialization agents and forces within the minority culture (de Anda, 1984; Valentine, 1971).

Valentine (1971) suggested that the idea of biculturation helped explain how people learn and practice both a mainstream culture and other ethnic cultures at the same time. The researcher argued that in the process, native cultural socialization was dependent upon an ethnically distinct experience which often included linguistic and other expressive forms of behavior. Development in the mainstream culture was simultaneously determined through exposure and contact with elements of the larger and prevailing mainstream culture.

de Anda (1984) explained that the bicultural model held the most promise for understanding the process by which individuals learned to function in the minority and majority cultures. However, de Anda believed that the model offered little information regarding the specific mechanisms through which dual socialization occurred. Consequently, de Anda posited that at least six factors were in involved in the bicultural socialization process:

- The degree of overlap of commonalty between the two cultures with regard to norms, values, beliefs, perceptions, and the like.

- The availability of culture translators, mediators, and models.

- The amount and type (positive or negative) of corrective feedback provided by each culture regarding attempts to produce normative behavior.

- The conceptual style and problem-solving approach of minority individuals and their mesh with prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture.

- The individual's degree of bilingualism.

- The degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority culture, such as skin color and facial features (p. 102).

de Anda (1984) suggested that Valentine's (1971) concept of biculturalism focused on the ability of a minority individual to "step in and out of the repertoires of two cultures that were seen as total distinct and separate" (p. 102). Conversely, de Anda argued that the bicultural experience was possible only because the two cultures were not entirely dissimilar. de Anda noted that dual socialization was made possible and facilitated by the amount of convergence between two cultures.

Zambrana (1988) further deconstructed and analyzed elements of the bicultural socialization model and stated that the construct of socialization could be viewed as "a process through which a person consciously or unconsciously participates in a number of diverse and complex roles" (p. 67). The researcher distinguished socialization from bicultural socialization by highlighting the bicultural mannerisms of a minority group which were the cornerstone of the bicultural socialization framework. As a result, Zambrana amended de Anda's (1984) definition of bicultural socialization to include "the process by which individuals from an ethnic minority group are instructed in the values, perceptions and normative behaviors of two cultural systems" (p. 71).

Zambrana (1988) employed the bicultural socialization framework to determine how Latina women make the transition from their native culture to the world of education. The researcher was interested in finding out how Latinas reconciled or learned different values and norms without losing their cultural

identity and how they overcame some of the "cultural assaults" they encountered from their peers in various educational and social settings. Cultural assaults pertain to an injury or assault to one's sense of identity and self-esteem which include complex psychological effects. Zambrana suggested that Latinas suffered differential effects from such assaults:

> For Latina women, [cultural] assaults lead to different patterns of behavior. There will be those women who have a traditional stance and who make themselves subservient to the codes of others. Others may become marginal, find self-worth in the denial of their cultural heritage, and in turn feel guilt and experience self-hatred. Alternately, there are those women who develop a sense of pride in their cultural heritage or ethnic consciousness, are aware that racism, sexism and elitism are integral to the system, and somehow learn the prevailing norms which are different (p.69).

In applying the bicultural socialization model to understand the educational trajectory of Latina women, Zambrana (1988) argued that the model must:

> begin with a broad definition of socialization as a group of roles and skills acquired to negotiate the educational system within which [individuals] must participate, and must also acknowledge that the institutional framework, as well as the social structure, works toward delimiting opportunities and choices. In effect, a reformulation of socialization and its relationship to identity development, and what psychological

mechanisms are used to reconcile our own perceptions of ourselves with those of the dominant culture, is sorely lacking. (p. 72)

According to Zambrana (1988), the central tenets of the bicultural socialization model include four elements: socialization, identity, culture, and institutional dimensions. Yet, the researcher argued that "there exists a need to examine and understand what psychological mechanisms are used by Latina women to reconcile their ascribed status and their own perceptions of their status in society" (p. 67). Below is a brief discussion of the four elements.

Socialization. In a bicultural socialization framework, the construct of socialization is directly influenced by social factors such as institutional settings (de Anda, 1984; Valentine, 1971; Zambrana, 1988). Valentine and de Anda have suggested that schools are an example of a socializing institutional setting. Zambrana indicated that schooling was a powerful determinant in the socialization experiences of Latina women. In her study, Zambrana found that a substantial number of Latina women felt that their elementary and secondary school experiences failed to prepare them for a higher education, and the majority of respondents felt no encouragement to pursue a higher education.

Identity. Zambrana (1988) also suggested that gender, race, class and language facility could be described as personal dimensions which influenced one's identity. The ability to identify with the Latino culture denoted certain values, beliefs and traditions which were often associated with this ethnic group. The researcher argued that Latino identity was a dynamic entity which changed in response to various structural conditions. Such changes were necessary to cope with cultural assaults. The notion of assault or injury to one's

sense of identity and self-esteem were complex psychological elements which could lead to feelings of marginality, denial of cultural heritage, guilt, stress, tension, and self-hatred.

Culture. The construct of culture in a bicultural socialization framework was defined as "a behavioral repertoire which develops as a function of one's historical roots as well as in response to the social conditions under which one lives" (Zambrana, 1988, p. 68). Culture in this instance, helps individuals to better deal with life but doesn't lock one into a particular lifestyle if options and choices are available. Zambrana argues that culture socializes individuals to think and act in specific and distinct ways to assure survival. From a cultural perspective, when values of a particular culture are violated, disregarded, or trivialized, the effect creates an invalidating life experience.

Institutional Dimensions. Similar to Valentine's (1971) findings, Zambrana (1988) suggested that institutional dimensions existed within schools and colleges that are capable of creating exclusionary practices in the areas of curriculum, organizational activities, teacher expectations, tracking and educational counseling. Critical educational theorists and researchers have argued that educational institutions, which are major socializing forces in a student's life, have long established psychosocial borders which have been difficult to overcome for many minority and nontraditional students (Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1992; McCarthy, 1990; Tierney, 1991; Valadez, 1993; Weis, 1985, 1992; Zambrana, 1988). These theorists suggest that the barriers which have been constructed by the dominant culture, exist within and outside the classroom, and include racism, classism and sexism. Such actions constitute

cultural assaults and create damaging psychological effects that marginalize students (Zambrana, 1988).

The transition to college has been shown to be critical to student success. However, making the transition is only the first step. The second involves making a connection with institutional life, a process that is equally critical to student success.

Forming Connections with Institutional Life

Numerous researchers have documented the importance of student engagement with institutional life. Student involvement concerns how students become engaged or involved in academic and social activities, systems, and networks that exist on a college campus. Although this concept has been referred to in research and writings prior to the mid-1970s (Chickering & Hannah, 1969; Spady, 1970, 1971), it began to gain widespread attention after Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987) introduced his model of social and academic integration. Tinto indicated that student retention was dependent on the extent that students are academically and socially integrated in college. Subsequent findings by numerous researchers during the nearly two decades since Tinto introduced his model supported the notion of social and academic integration in their discussion of student retention (Astin, 1984, 1985; Bean 1980; Cabrera, Nora & Castañeda, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Mow & Nettles, 1990; Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985; Nora, 1987; Nora et al., 1990; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Related findings by Astin (1984, 1985) resulted in the development of student involvement theory.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggest that student involvement theory represents a middle ground between psychological and sociological explanations of student change in college. The researchers state that student

involvement theory has two dimensions: institutional and individual. The institutional dimension concerns the degree of institutional opportunity for involvement. The individual dimension concerns how often and to what level students become involved in college life. In reviewing twenty years of research on how college affects students, the researchers argue that numerous studies have shown that the level of student engagement is important and has been related to a number of educational outcomes. But it is also related to the tendency or the ability of the student to exploit the opportunities that the institution provides. Employing the theory, there is an underlying assumption that greater involvement pays off: the greater amount of individual investment, the greater the return, in terms of educational outcomes (Astin, 1984, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Student Involvement Theory. Astin (1985) argues that student involvement in college is the key to maximizing student learning. Simply stated, "students learn by becoming involved" (Astin, 1985, p. 133). From Astin's perspective, the more a student invests physical and psychological energy in the academic experience, the greater the potential for talent development. Involvement in the academic and social culture of an institution includes doing academic work, participating in extracurricular activities, interacting with faculty and college personnel, etc. (Astin, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Astin (1985) suggests that the institutional environment plays a critical role for students by offering a greater number and variety of opportunities for encounters with other ideas and people.

The theory of student involvement is based on the Freudian notion of cathexis, in which individuals invest psychological energy in objects outside themselves such as friends, families, schooling, jobs, etc. Astin (1984) defines

student involvement as "the amount of energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). Astin (1985) outlines involvement theory in five basic postulates:

- involvement requires students' investment of physical and psychological energy in various "objects" outside themselves in both generalized (i.e., the student experience) and specific (i.e., preparing for a math exam) ways;

- involvement occurs along a continuum with a student manifesting different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times;

- involvement can be measured either qualitatively or quantitatively, such as whether students review and comprehend assignments or the number of hours students spend studying;

- the amount of student learning and development is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of student involvement;

- the effectiveness of educational policy and practice is directly related to how these practices increase student involvement (p. 135-136).

Further, Astin (1985) states that the highly involved student is one who studies avidly and lengthily, spends significant amounts of time on campus, is involved in campus activities, and interacts with both faculty and students on a

regular basis. Astin suggests that the institutional environment plays a critical role for students by offering a greater number and variety of opportunities for encounters with other ideas and people. In essence, institutions provide the opportunities for academic and social involvement but students must provide the motivation, energy, and effort to become involved.

Astin (1985) cautions that bringing about desired learning and development in a particular curriculum requires more than exposing a student to a particular set of courses. It requires structuring a learning environment to encourage active student participation. Student involvement theory emphasizes that course content, teaching techniques and college resources such as labs, libraries, etc., are secondary compared to efforts designed to maximize student involvement. Student involvement theory views students' investments in out-of-class activities such as with family, friends and jobs as possible hindrances to making connections in college.

For many first-year students, making both academic and social connections in college is vital to their retention. Astin (1985) argued that some negative effects were associated with attending community college. Astin stated, "Community colleges are places where the involvement of both faculty members and students appears to be minimal: All students are commuters, and most are part-timers. Thus they [students] presumably manifest less involvement simply because of their part-time status" (Astin, 1985, p. 146). Hence, the presumed negative effect of attending community college makes the need for academic and social connections crucial for first-time freshmen.

Limitations of Student Involvement Theory. There are several limitations that exist within student involvement theory. First, community college student populations were not included in the data set that Astin used to the theory.

However, in discussing the theory, Astin (1985) suggests "it would be useful to know whether particular student characteristics (such as socioeconomic status, academic preparation, gender) are significantly related to different forms of involvement and whether a given form of involvement produces different outcomes for different types of students" (p. 153).

Second, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state that Astin's conception of student involvement suggests an almost passive role for students in their own development, a role analogous to that of raw materials (inputs) in a production process or as the hospital patient whose improvement depends primarily upon the skill and prescriptions of the physician. The researchers also question whether Astin's postulates truly constitute a "theory." Pascarella and Terenzini suggest that Astin offers a general dynamic, a principle, rather than any detailed, systemic description of the behaviors or phenomena being predicted, the variables presumed to influence involvement, the mechanisms by which those variables relate to and influence one another, or the precise nature of the process by which growth or change occurs.

Third, in a recent study, Rendón (1994) presented several functional problems associated with involvement theory. The theory assumes that all individuals can involve themselves easily into college life. Also, Rendón argues that the theory does not acknowledge that most two-and four-year colleges are set up to facilitate involvement for a selective groups of students-- those whose families have attended college, students from middle to upper class backgrounds, male students, White students, etc. Finally, student involvement theory suggests that students do anything they can in order to fulfill maximum involvement, including assimilating into the mainstream academic culture, disconnecting from the past, and shedding their culture. In short, students are

expected to commit a form of "cultural suicide" in order to succeed (Rendón, 1994; Tierney, 1992).

Developing Student Learning Perceptions

Thus far, the literature indicates that academic success of students during the first year of college is dependent on how well students negotiate the transition to college and become involved in institutional life. A scant body of literature points to the importance of a third dynamic: the extent to which a student begins to believe that he or she is capable of college-level learning. Interestingly, both in- and out-of-class, formal and informal experiences may be associated with helping students to believe in their capacity to learn.

The Importance of Confirmation and Validation.

Terenzini and others (1994) suggest that in-class experiences, including interactions between faculty and students, are considered important in fostering learning. Baxter Magolda (1992) similarly noted the importance associated with faculty confirming student learning. In her study, the researcher identified faculty behaviors and scenarios that led to student confirmation and empowerment while suggesting that academic confirmation for college learners often depends on the professor's behavior. In her study, the most satisfied learners were those who were confirmed by the helping attitudes of professors and by opportunities for students to get to know them. Baxter Magolda noted that the professor's teaching behavior in class was crucial to a student's learning satisfaction. Teachers who used demonstrations, entertained questions, and provided opportunities for students to get to know each other created environments where students interacted and learned in a cooperative manner. The researcher found that professors' efforts to involve themselves with students

inside of class were equally important as cooperative peer associations. In short, the researcher found that college faculty could help to confirm students by exhibiting a helping attitude and taking advantage of opportunities to get to know students.

Baxter Magolda's (1992) study revealed that faculty-student interaction in the form of academic confirmation could "heighten students' interest in learning, strengthen their investment in that process, create comfortable learning atmospheres and develop relationships that foster understanding" (p. 268). Baxter Magolda found that faculty who employed instructional approaches which were transmitted through class expectations, peer interactions and evaluation methods had a positive and lasting effect on student learning.

Belenky and others (1986) cited the importance of professors confirming students and argued that "for women, confirmation and community are prerequisites, rather than consequences of development (p. 94)." In their study, the researchers found that women who were treated as stupid, incompetent or incapable of learning, yearned for acceptance and validation. The needs of these women were in stark contrast with what was offered to them in class. Women expressed that professors who viewed themselves as "experts" or authorities usually tried to dominate the less knowledgeable either by assaulting them with information or by withdrawing information. However, these women conveyed that they wanted confirmation that they could be trusted to know and to learn. In addition, women wanted to know that they already knew something, that there was something good inside them, and that knowledge gained through personal experience was important and valuable.

In a study of first-year college students, Terenzini and others (1994) found that what appeared to transform students who had doubts about their capacity to learn and succeed in college were incidents where students

experienced some form or degree of validation—when someone took the initiative to lend a helping hand, encouraged them, believed in them, affirmed their ability to do college-level work and supported their academic endeavors and social adjustment. The fact that faculty and out-of-class agents such as parents and friends were doing this during the first semester in college affirmed the need to validate students early and often.

Along the same lines, Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) drew attention to the needs of adult students to find an institution where they "mattered." Mattering is defined as "the beliefs people have, whether right or wrong, that they matter to someone else, that they are the object of someone else's attention, and that others care about them and appreciate them" (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989, p. 21). The researchers argued that mattering is essential for adult learners to feel satisfied and involved in a college environment. Similarly, the researchers suggested that the dual constructs of mattering and marginality (the degree to which one feels left out), become indicators of adult student adjustment on campus and reveal how well an institution accommodates adult learners. Mattering was originally labeled by Morris Rosenberg, a sociologist, as "the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension" (Rosenberg & Mccullough, 1981, p. 165).

In describing the effects of negative faculty-student relations, Rendón (1994) stated that faculty possess both the power to validate and invalidate students inside and outside of class. Invalidation is often transmitted through negative faculty-student interactions, the lack of student feedback, and when faculty discount a student's heuristic knowledge (knowledge gained from life experiences). Rendón (1994) as well as Terenzini and others (1994) argued that students who are not validated in class might rely on out-of-class validation

to help them persist in college. However, the researchers note that not all students would be able to obtain out-of-class validation. Subsequently, in the absence of both in- and out-of-class validation, the most fragile students might likely leave college (Rendón, 1994).

A Model of Connected Teaching. Belenky and others' (1986) ground-breaking study of women as knowers suggested that the predominant model of teaching was unsuitable for women whose ways of knowing were in contrast to those of men. For instance, men tended to interpret their world by separating themselves, while women saw and interpreted their world through connection with others. Further, the traditional model of teaching tends to reinforce doubt until students prove themselves worthy of being a part of the community of learners. This process appears to work well for men, but not for women who seek validation early on in their schooling, given that many do not have strong feelings about their capacity to learn. It may also not work well for nontraditional students such as Latinos who need confirmation and validation of their ability to do college-level work early on in their academic careers. Belenky and others (1986) present a different model of learning that they believe will work for both genders. In presenting their model of connected teaching, the researchers indicate that:

> . . . educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary

requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. (p. 229)

Belenky and others' (1986) posit that at least six elements must be implemented to dismantle traditional authoritarian teaching approaches. Teachers must: (1) share in the learning process; (2) serve as midwives to student learning; (3) foster connected classes; (4) provide objectivity; (5) suppress student doubt; and (6) make women's development the aim of education (Belenky et al., 1986). The next section will explore each of these aspects and their impact on accommodating and validating diverse ways of knowing.

Teachers Sharing in the Learning Process. Various research studies have found that women learned more and felt more comfortable in sharing the learning process when both teacher and student engaged in the process of thinking and learning (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987). This mode of learning contrasts with the traditional "banking" model where the instructor merely presents information for a student to receive or reject (Freire, 1971).

Most teaching methods employed by college professors are still predicated on traditional pedagogical models such as the authoritarian banking model and adversarial doubting model (Belenky et al., 1986). Both of these models appear to be wrong for women. Freire (1971) argued that educators should abandon the banking model in favor of a problem-posing model, which is more collaborative in design. Belenky and others (1986) stated that in the banking model, the teacher takes few risks:

> He composes his thoughts in private. Students are permitted to see the product of his thinking, but the process of gestation is hidden from view...So long as teachers hide the imperfect processes of their thinking, allowing their students to glimpse only the polished products, students will remain convinced that only Einstein—or a professor could think up a theory (p. 215).

In order to create shared learning experiences between teacher and student, students need to watch both female and male professors fail and succeed in solving class problems. Professors must be willing to share their thought processes with students. In turn, students must be allowed to participate in solving problems. Utilizing this approach will allow students to understand that thinking is merely a human, imperfect and attainable activity (Belenky et al., 1986).

Teachers as Midwives. In a connected model of teaching, teachers are required to help students articulate and expand their latent knowledge. Belenky and others (1986) have labeled this type of connected instructor as the "midwife teacher." The researchers argue that "unlike the bankers who deposit knowledge into a learner's head, the midwives draw it out. . . [they] assist students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating on it" (p. 217).

Midwife teachers are similar to Freire's (1971) partner-teachers, who assist students in the formulation of thoughts and ideas and encourage students to speak from their own inner voice. The midwife-teacher's primary concern is "to preserve the student's fragile newborn thoughts, to see that they are born with their truth intact, that they do not turn into acceptable lies" (Belenky et al.,

1986, p. 218). A secondary concern for the midwife-teacher is to support the evolution of a student's thinking process.

Midwife-teachers focus on their students' knowledge, not their own. They contribute to student learning when needed but understand that knowledge construction is a product of the student. Midwife-teachers help students deliver their words to the world and use their knowledge to help put students in communication with other voices in society. The midwife-teacher also encourages students to use their own knowledge in everyday life situations and scenarios (Belenky et al., 1986).

Teachers Fostering Connected Classes. In a connected class, students and teachers talk about what they are thinking in a public forum. As the teacher and student think and talk together, their roles merge until the teacher becomes a student and the student becomes a teacher. Hence, in a connected class, people get to know each other not as occupants of predefined roles (teacher, student, etc.) but as individuals with specific styles of thinking. This process is necessary for students to consider themselves "real knowers" and to find acceptance for their ideas in the public world (Belenky et al., 1986).

Traditional forms of college teaching have focused on the separation between teacher and student and between knowledge and experience. In this format, teacher and student are separate variables in the learning process, while knowledge is divorced from life experience (which is often valued less than knowledge). This separation hinders students' ability to construct their own perspectives. However, the connected teaching model requires teachers to eliminate separation in favor of connection. Consequently, constructing one's own perspectives and ideas often requires positive and rewarding interactions between teacher and student and the establishment of linkages

between knowledge and experience. In a connected class the teacher recognizes that each student possesses a unique perspective, but is able to transform private opinions into public 'objects' for members of the class to absorb in their own unique fashion. Hence, in a connected class, truth and shared knowledge are constructed through consensus and not through conflict (Belenky et al., 1986).

Teachers Providing Objectivity. In a connected model of teaching, professors attempt to discover and understand the truth that exists within students. From a teacher's perspective, objectivity requires seeing students on their own terms. This approach differs from traditional teaching formats where the student must view class material through the teacher's eyes. Conversely, connected teachers receive and accept a student's feeling toward the subject matter before discussing and acting upon the student's response.

Belenky and others (1986) suggest that connected teaching is both objective and personal. Connected teachers employ a technique similar to participant observation—neither truly attached nor truly detached from their subjects (students). In connected classes, teachers and students meet on common turf as short-term partners where teachers give students a chance to be heard and to provide feedback. Connected teachers further strive for objectivity by treating student responses as real and independent of their own thoughts. In this manner, students are allowed to develop their own arguments.

Connected teachers attempt to address objectivity as a personal issue. This is accomplished by not ignoring or discarding a student's ideas, opinions or words in a public discussion. Rather, student voices are allowed to be heard in full view of class, understood by others, and used to illuminate class material. As a result, personal student accounts become powerful testimony to augment

class material, which in turn takes on a more personal and lasting nature. In this manner, "subjectivity and objectivity become one" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 226).

Teachers Suppressing Doubt. In the connected teaching model, teachers serve as believers to doubting students. Teachers trust their students' thinking and encourage them to expand their ideas. Yet, some of the most self-doubting students are women. Many women arrive to college already consumed with self-doubt which is often imposed by outside forces, is oppressive in nature, and eventually leads to alienation. For women, the experience of being doubted is often more debilitating than energizing. Experiencing doubt in a traditional conflict model of teaching (as opposed to a connected model) can be destructive for women and can only confirm their belief that they are inadequate knowers. A doubting model of learning may be just as inappropriate for men as it is for women (Belenky et al, 1986).

To alleviate the feelings of self-doubt among female students, a sense of community is fostered in the connected classroom. In establishing community between teacher and students, self-doubt and alienation are suppressed. In the connected classroom, students are spared the effects of alienation, repression and division. Rather, this environment offers a sense of community, power, and integrity which together can foster intellectual development and self-confidence (Belenky et al, 1986).

Teachers Making Women's Development the Aim of Education. Due to their doubting and inadequate educational experience, many women require the attention and support of connected teachers. There remains a need for teachers to guide women in reaching more mature stages of intellectual,

epistemological and ethical development. Traditional models of teaching and learning have failed women in this regard. However, employing a connected teaching and learning model may be the vehicle in which true female development occurs. Further, connected teaching and learning ensures that both men and women develop in a communal setting as connected knowers (Belenky et al., 1986).

Freire (1971) argued that if a connected model of teaching (problem-posing) were employed in education, it would "undermine the power of oppression" (p. 62). Similarly, Belenky and others (1986) argue that if educators replace the separate with the connected model of teaching and learning, women would be spared the alienation, repression and division that their schooling confers upon them. Education administered in a connected model would create community, power and integrity for women. As a result, a woman's intellectual, ethical and spiritual development would be allowed to grow and flourish (Belenky et al., 1986).

Gilligan (1982), Josselson (1987), as well as Belenky and others (1986) have argued that for women, attachment and connected knowing are fundamental to growth and learning since they strongly influence how women think and make decisions about themselves and others. These researchers imply that women are often guided by an ethic of care and responsibility in making moral decisions, and their identity has more to do with intimacy than with separation because of their connection with the social world around them. Connected teaching can help women further their development with a degree of certainty that their social consciousness will be maintained and respected.

By listening to women's voices, educators can help women grow and develop into powerful learners and connected knowers. In making women's development the aim of education, teachers must stress "connection over

separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, collaboration over debate. . . and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience" to create a truly connected learning environment (Belenky et al. , 1986, p. 229). At the same time, teachers must be willing to encourage all students to evolve their own work patterns based on the problems they are pursuing. In this way, both men and women can be nurtured into fostering a true sense of emancipation, equality and community in the classroom.

This section has argued that one aim of education should be the establishment of connected teaching and a redefinition of how teachers interact with female students. Further, the focus of connected teaching is to create a more active, sharing and responsive approach towards student learning. Only in this manner can true development occur for all students. Indeed, the model of connected teaching may have potential for Latino and nontraditional students who share many of the characteristics that Belenky and others (1986) found for women, such as self-doubts about their ability to do academic work.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Although many approaches have been used to study student experiences in college, a qualitative design was adopted for this study because it makes it possible to elicit multiple perspectives of student life in and out of the classroom environment. This qualitative approach contrasts with the predominant positivist approach that Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found during their examination of research on how college affects students. After summarizing more than twenty years of research in this area, Pascarella and Terenzini suggest that "judicious and creative qualitative, naturalistic, or ethnographic approaches may simply be better and more sensitive ways of capturing many of the subtle and fine-grained complexities of college impact than the more traditional quantitative approaches" (p. 634).

In accordance with Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) call for increasing the number of qualitative research studies to investigate college impact on students, Conrad and others (1993) concur that there remains a need to expand the knowledge base in higher education research through the use of qualitative inquiry. The researchers outline four arguments in defending the use of qualitative research methods in higher education:

> First, there is a growing appreciation among scholars across many fields of study that there are a variety of perspectives and approaches that need to be considered by qualitative researchers [who are often] fueled by a growing disenchantment with positivist modes of inquiry.

> Second, a compelling reason [for qualitative inquiry] is that traditional quantitative approaches are limited in their ability to probe some of the central questions in higher education today...in short, due to the limitations (or natural boundaries) of traditional methods, we have come to know certain topics within higher education—and dimensions of these topics—quite well while ignoring others.
>
> Third, in light of growing concerns about campus racism, gender bias, gender- and class-based conflict, and multiculturalism, there is a growing need for research methods that probe areas often deemed "unsearchable" because of their personal and highly subjective nature.
>
> Fourth, qualitative methods spread—often unpredictably—across multiple domains...in addition to pointing out new avenues for inquiry, they also suggest an internal redefinition of the field of higher education as we currently know it, including a rearrangement of traditional topical domains (p. xi-xii).

Despite the limited number of qualitative studies investigating student experiences in college, a growing number of researchers have applied qualitative research designs with meaningful results (Attinasi, 1986, 1989; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Fleishman, 1991; Kuh et al., 1991; London, 1978, 1989; Lowe, 1989; Melchior-Walsh, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994; Valadez, 1993; Weis, 1985). Adhering to the basic tenets of qualitative inquiry, these researchers have employed techniques that "describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain...[social] phenomena" (Van Maanen, 1983, p. 9). Yet, when considering a qualitative

research design to examine a social situation, Merriam (1988) and Creswell (1994) argue that (at least) six basic assumptions must be taken into account:

1. A qualitative research study is concerned with process, rather than outcomes or products.
2. A qualitative research study is interested in meaning--how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
3. A qualitative research study assumes that there are multiple realities and the social world is a function of personal interaction and perception.
4. A qualitative research study involves fieldwork. The researcher utilizes naturalistic inquiry to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.
5. A qualitative research study is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through narrative or graphics.
6. The data analysis process in a qualitative research study is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details (Creswell, 1994, p. 145).

In accordance with the directives stated by Merriam (1988) and Creswell (1994) for planning a qualitative research study, a focus group design was selected in an attempt to uncover the experiences of Latino students attending two community colleges. A personal approach was required in order to identify and determine the perspectives of Latino students regarding their transition to college, the connections they make in college, and their perceptions of college

learning.

Focus Group Research

The primary qualitative method used in this study was face-to-face focus group interviews. The focus group technique is unique since "it allows for group interaction and greater insight into why certain opinions are held [and] can improve the planning and design of new programs, provide means of evaluating existing programs, and produce insights for developing marketing strategies" (Krueger, 1988, p.15). Focus groups have been a mainstay in private sector research and have been particularly effective in providing information about why people think or feel the way they do. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the focus group technique was thought to be an appropriate way to begin to uncover the dynamics associated with negotiating the first semester in a two-year college. Of particular concern was the use of student voices that provide richness, nuance and candidness.

In this study it was understood that since each community college setting was different, much could be learned about students in their native environment by conducting group interviews on individual campuses. In conceptualizing this exploratory research, it was believed that the study could be used as a guide for future research. For instance, researchers might use the findings to design an ethnographic study, survey research, or case study to probe further into the dynamics involved in the educational trajectory of Latinos, as well as how this cohort negotiates the educational system within which it participates.

Site Selection

Initially, a letter was sent to two community college presidents explaining the scope of the research study and inviting their institution to participate. Both

colleges were selected because of their location in predominately Latino communities which is reflected in the composition of the student body at both campuses. One college is located in a suburb of southern California which historically has been the center of Latino political and economic development in the region. The second college is located in a west Texas city with a predominant Mexican American population and has recently been recognized for its international importance along the United States and Mexico border. Despite similarities in the Latino composition of the student body, both colleges offered variation in student characteristics (e.g., first-generation students, gender, family background, socioeconomic class) and institutional traits (e.g., size, curricular emphasis, geographical location). Below is a brief description of each college. Fictitious names are used to ensure anonymity.

West Coast Community College

This college serves a metropolitan area in California where Latino students comprise 65 percent of the school's 14,000 credit students. West Coast is part of a nine-campus, urban community college district. A Mexican American male was the president at West Coast at the time of the site visit. In an interview the president was quoted as stating, "[West Coast] serves a highly non-traditional student population, with a rich variety of cultural traditions, income levels, and educational backgrounds represented in its student body." His statement reveals the contemporary profile of community college students at his campus and within many of the district campuses:

> A large number of students come from lower-income level homes, and 84 percent of the adult population in the College service area has twelve years or less of education. A majority of the students are the first

generation in their family to attend college, and 22 percent of the students come from homes with annual incomes of $6,000 or less (1992-1993 West Coast Catalog).

Besides its heavy concentration of Latinos, West Coast's student body is composed of 20 percent Asian, 12 percent White, and 3 percent African American students. The college's service area includes 16 cities and communities, including the largest concentration of Latinos and the second largest concentration of Asians in the United States.

Southwest Community College

This institution is located in Texas within ten miles of the United States border with Mexico. As a result of its geographic location, Southwest historically has had a high concentration of Mexican-American students since its creation in 1971 when 900 students enrolled at the campus. In 1978, Southwest added the first of two branch campuses in the southeast region of the city, and a year later it added a second branch campus in the northeastern region. During 1993 spring semester, more than 18,000 students attended Southwest Community College and its two branch campuses. During this period, over 10,300 students were classified as first-year students (56.1 percent). Latinos had the largest enrollment on campus (81 percent), while Whites and African Americans participated at a significantly smaller rate (15 and 3 percent, respectively). American Indians and Asians each comprised less than one percent of the overall student body at Southwest.

A Mexican American male was the president at Southwest during the site visit. Southwest promoted its commitment to the nontraditional students through transfer, vocational, and alternative education programs including televised

courses, international education and flex-entry programs. According to a recent Southwest catalog:

> [Southwest] recognizes and accepts its responsibility to meet the special needs of people in the area's multicultural international society. It is [Southwest's] intent to search out ways that it can capitalize on the unique strengths of the area. This can be achieved through an awareness of the benefits that a multilingual, multicultural, international society offers. [Southwest] will vigorously seek ways in which to enhance the quality of life for people by providing educational programs and services which prepare its participants to enrich their lives and contribute to their own, as well as their community's well-being... [Southwest] accepts the responsibility to help [students] with quality educational and career guidance and development; meaningful general, transfer and career education programs; and cultural enrichment programs (1992-1993 Southwest Catalog).

Data Collection

Critical to this study was an understanding of the complexities associated with navigating the first semester of college from the perspective of Latino students. As defined in the purpose of this study, first-year Latino students comprise the identifiable target group and are the unit of analysis. A random sample of Latino students would have been appropriate if the study sought to draw statistical inferences to a larger population. However, this study was not concerned with making statistical inferences, and a random sample of students was not selected. Rather, the intent was to describe the first-year experiences of a selected group of Latino students attending two community colleges in

California and Texas.

Latino students were recruited and selected by a campus contact person selected by the president. The contact person was instructed to select participants according to the following criteria: Mixed gender and first-year Latino students just completing the first semester in college. Krueger (1988) states that focus group interviews work best with groups that are already established and when all participants have equal status. He elaborates on selecting participants and forming a focus group:

> [that] it is important to keep in mind that the intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation. As a result, focus groups require a flexible research design, and while a degree of randomization [in selecting the sample] may be used, it is not the primary factor in selection (p. 96).

Each contact person was sent information on the characteristics of students sought for the interviews. A letter of invitation was sent to each contact person which was later mailed to all participants, along with an informed consent sheet outlining the nature of the study. Each contact person was responsible for selecting participants and forming focus groups consisting solely of first-year Latino students who were completing the first semester in college.

Students participating in this study were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, that their responses would be kept confidential and that they would be compensated $10 for their participation. Seventeen Latino

students were interviewed in three focus groups at West Coast during the 1992 fall semester. Thirteen Latino students were interviewed in three focus groups at Southwest during the 1993 spring semester. The total sample of 30 subjects selected for this study exceeds the minimal requirement of 22-23 subjects recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for a qualitative study. Table 1 details the number of Latino focus group interviews and student characteristics at each site.

In accordance with Krueger's (1988) suggestion that at least three (preferably four) focus groups be scheduled at each site in a study, three group interviews were conducted on each campus. Krueger argues that the first two focus groups in a study typically provide a considerable amount of new information, but by the third or fourth session, a fair amount may have already been covered. "The suggested rule of thumb is to plan for four groups but evaluate responses after the third group" (Krueger, 1988, p. 97).

Although focus groups have traditionally ranged in size from ten to twelve people, this study employed smaller-sized groups with four to six participants. Krueger (1988) indicates that smaller focus groups have become increasingly popular because subjects are easier to recruit and host, while group interaction is generally more comfortable to participants. However, employing smaller-sized focus groups could limit the total range of experiences simply because the groups are smaller. Yet, Krueger (1994) argues that focus group research is not static since the approach and method are constantly changing. During the past decade, the researcher found that numerous focus group studies have used smaller groups of 5-7 participants. He argued that smaller groups not only offer more opportunity for participants to dialogue with one another, but are considerably more practical to set up and manage.

This study employed a 13-question, open-ended interview protocol that

TABLE 1

Latino Student Respondents

n=30

Site	Focus Groups	Male	Female	Student Total
West Coast Community College	3	11	6	17
Southwest Community College	3	6	7	13
Totals	6	17	13	30

was administered in a focus group format (see Appendix A). The protocol questions were constructed to avoid leading students to any particular response. The interview protocol was purposefully open-ended and broadly structured to contain prompts for information about student backgrounds, teaching and learning in- and out-of-college, the significant people and events in a student's learning experience, how students handled themselves in class, how students learned best, and the students' perception of the general effects of college.

The protocol used in this study was constructed, in part, from components of two separate interview schedules used in different studies: the Transition to College Project of the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Terenzini et al., 1994); and the Education for Women's Development Project (Belenky et al., 1986). Questions directly relating to the transition to college were borrowed from Terenzini and others' (1994) study on the transition to college for first-year college students. Belenky and others' (1986) inquiry into the role of education in a woman's life provided the foundation for questions relating to how students perceive their learning ability.

Each focus group interview was conducted in a quiet meeting room on each college campus away from noise and visual distractions. Each interview was led by a moderator who created a thoughtful, open atmosphere, provided the ground rules, and set the tone for the discussion. During the interviews, the moderator was responsible for directing the discussion, keeping the conversation flowing, taking minimal notes, and probing students when a comment needed further clarification or investigation. Meanwhile, a co-moderator was present and was responsible for recording all participant statements through the use of a micro cassette recorder, taking comprehensive handwritten notes, operating the micro cassette recorder, handling room

logistics, responding to unexpected interruptions, and paying all respondents at the conclusion of the interviews.

All interviews began with a brief introduction by the moderator and co-moderator explaining the nature of the study, the importance of an open and sharing dialogue, and the topical areas addressed in the protocol. Each participant was asked to introduce himself/herself and to provide information regarding their family background (whether first in family to attend college), course load (full- or part-time student), and employment status (working full- or part-time, or not employed). Because of the voluntary nature of the group interviews, not all students responded to each question. On occasion, the co-moderator would ask a probing question to clarify a student's response.

It was often the custom for the moderator and co-moderator to meet for up to one-half hour after each focus group session. The post meeting allowed for an analysis of the responses and impressions from each session, a comparison of researcher notes, and a check of the tape recorder to insure that all comments were captured. The post meeting was made possible by scheduling each group interview at least one-half hour apart. Likewise, a post meeting was held after the conclusion of the final interview at each site to collaborate on the overall impressions of the groups and to prepare brief written summaries of the key points highlighted in the discussions.

Data Analysis Procedure

All focus group interview sessions as well as post meeting discussions between the moderator and co-moderator were tape recorded and transcribed. The data collected from transcribed interviews and researcher notes were initially analyzed in hardcopy format. The transcribed data were then loaded into a computerized database maintained by HyperQual (Padilla, 1991), a

Macintosh-based qualitative data analysis program. The data were then segmented by site and focus group in an attempt to organize and sequence the data for further analysis.

The data analysis stage of this study was divided into four phases. Phase One involved analyzing the protocol in order to identify the topic(s) addressed in each question and accompanying probes. Each topic was sorted into a related (thematic) category. Each thematic category was depicted in a pseudo-constructed model along with the subordinate topics identified by the protocol questions and probes. Each thematic model was used as a template for sorting and organizing the transcribed student responses according to thematic category during the initial phase of the data analysis. This technique has been termed "thematizing" by Padilla (1994) and produced three thematized models for this study: Negotiating life transitions, making connections in college, and reflections of student learning.

Phase Two required analyzing data (by site and focus group) by paying particular attention to student transition patterns, involvement activities and processes, and student perceptions of learning. Relevant student comments and researcher notes from each focus group interview were selected. This phase was accomplished by reviewing hardcopy drafts of the transcribed student interviews and using HyperQual (Padilla, 1991) to examine the data in electronic format.

All data gathered from the focus group interviews, including researcher notes, were analyzed using an inductive approach. Inductive data analysis helped to identify the multiple realities found in the data and to establish subject-object interactions (Van Maanen, 1988). For example, the data were analyzed by student responses according to a specific interview question. During this step a variety of student responses were closely examined in an

attempt to identify emergent constructs. The researcher's interpretation was determined by the student responses (meaning) and researcher notes (perception).

Phase Three required sorting and cataloging the exemplars into thematic files. Each exemplar was identified and classified with an emphasis on selecting responses that were common between campuses and student characteristics, as well as distinctive thematic differences. HyperQual was employed in this phase to manipulate the data into sorted categories and to report the contents of all thematic files.

Phase Four required creating preliminary categories that were constructed from related and sorted exemplars. A concept model (Padilla, 1991) was devised during this phase to graphically depict the breadth and variation of each developed category. In defense of this technique, Van Maanen (1988) states, "[during data analysis] the ethnographer has the final word on how a culture is to be interpreted and presented" (p. 51). Likewise, Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) argue that "in field research, formal rules and cannons of [traditional] research must be bent, twisted, or otherwise abandoned to accommodate the demands of the specific research situation and the personal characteristics of the investigator" (p. xi).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in several respects. First, this study is descriptive, as opposed to causal. It simply describes relationships among student experiences and retention, and no attempt is made to draw a causal relationship between the two dynamics. In contrasting focus group research to survey research, Bers and Smith (1988) state:

Focus group research in no way substitutes for theoretically sound and well-executed survey research or the examination of student records. It can, however, provide useful insights into the ideas, motives, and behavior of focus group participants and others like them" (p. 57).

In accordance with the descriptive nature of this research, this exploratory study sought to understand and uncover insights from student voices in order to identify critical themes related to making the transition to college, making connections in college, and student perceptions of their learning ability.

Second, by virtue of the qualitative nature of this study, the findings from the focus group interviews are not generalizable to the broad array of two-year colleges throughout the nation. Both colleges were purposefully selected for this study because of their large Latino student populations. Hence, no claim is made that these institutions are typical of other community colleges, and the Latino experience depicted in these institutions may not be typical of Latinos enrolled in two-year colleges in other parts of the country.

Third, the subjects participating in this study were not selected randomly nor were they proportionally representative of any campus populations. Thus, statistical generalizations beyond the sample cannot be made. Fourth, these students were selected without regard towards randomization, some students might have known, taken classes or worked with each other. The familiar nature of the student participants could have influenced their response within the group interview.

Fifth, despite the commonalty between participants in the study, group dynamics and consensus can often influence the commentary provided by an

individual participant. As a result, there might be a reluctance to express negative observations in front of other students. Likewise, students may be embarrassed to elaborate on a comment if they feel they will be taunted by other students in the group. Krueger (1988) elaborates on this issue by raising questions regarding participants and their interactions within the group interview:

> Were participants holding back because of others in the group? Were they being selective in what they said because of others in the group? Were they taking positions on issues simply because of certain individuals in the group? The analyst cannot know all the dynamics that might have influenced participants in the discussion (p. 165).

Finally, questions relating to validity may appear to jeopardize the integrity of this study. Questions relating to whether the focus group responses are valid or how much confidence one can have in the focus group results are questions that can present special problems to the researcher. Krueger (1994) defined validity as "the degree to which the procedure really measures what it proposes to measure" (p. 31). The central question is whether the use of the focus group method <u>really</u> provided perceptions of a given dynamic or phenomenon or whether the results were artificially developed by the interactions of group participants. To address this issue, Krueger provides the following explanation:

> Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry. . . Also, if the problem does not lend itself to focus groups, then focus groups are an invalid procedure. In short,

focus groups are very much like other social science measurement procedures in which validity depends not only on the procedures used but also on context (p. 31).

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Protocol

1. What, if anything, has been the most or least helpful to you at this college?
2. Looking back over your whole life, can you tell me about a real powerful learning experience that you've had in college?
3. Think about teaching in a very broad sense. Who, in or out of college has helped you learn better than anyone else?
4. Tell me about things you would like to learn in or outside of college?
5. How do you feel when you come to this college and what makes you feel this way?
6. Has coming to college affected your relationships with your family and friends? If so, how?
7. How, if at all, has being here changed the way you think about yourself?
8. What do you think your instructors think about you?
9. How do you handle yourself in class?
10. How do you learn best? Why do you feel you can learn best using this method?
11. In your opinion, why do some students succeed when others fail?
12. What advice would you offer to incoming freshmen during their first year here?
13. If you could change anything about yourself in college, what would it be?

APPENDIX B

Thematized Focus Group Protocol

Student Transitions

1. (5) How do you feel when you come to this college and what makes you feel this way?
2. (6) Has coming to college affected your relationships with your family and friends? If so, how?
3. (7) How, if at all, has being here changed the way you think about yourself?
4. (12) What advice would you offer to incoming freshmen during their first year here?
5. (13) If you could change anything about yourself in college, what would it be?

Making Connections

6. (1) What, if anything, has been the most or least helpful to you at this college?

Perceptions of Student Learning

7. (2) Looking back over your whole life, can you tell me about a real powerful learning experience that you've had in college?
8. (3) Think about teaching in a very broad sense. Who, in or out of college has helped you learn better than anyone else?
9. (4) Tell me about things you would like to learn in or outside of college?
10. (8) What do you think your instructors think about you?
11. (9) How do you handle yourself in class?

12. (10) How do you learn best? Why do you feel you can learn best using this method?

13. (11) In your opinion, why do some students succeed when others fail?